

12m.  
Med  
Miss-  
India

7467

# The American Hospital for Women and Children in Madura

By REV. E. S. HOLTON

WOMAN'S BOARD OF MISSIONS  
14 BEACON STREET  
BOSTON

1919



THE AMERICAN HOSPITAL FOR WOMEN  
AND CHILDREN IN MADURA

DR. HARRIET E. PARKER

*By Rev. E. S. Holton*

THE ancient city of Madura is on the tenth degree of north latitude about 150 miles north of Cape Comorin. The word "Madura" means sweetness, from a dew of honey fabled to have once settled there. But to thousands of women during the past twenty years it has meant relief from pain, suffering and numbing fear, since it is there that the little white Doctor Ammarl is ready night or day to bring to bear upon any sort of physical ill the skill of her slender fingers, the experience of an active brain and the courage of a dauntless heart.

There are hospitals for women in Madras and at Vellore in the North Arcot district, 150 and 300 miles north of Madura. But they are as impossible for the bulk of the people that have need as the hospitals in New York would be for the natives of Virginia. In the districts of Trichinopoly, Madura, Ramnad. Tinnevelley and Travancore, a region about half as large as New England and with a population of fifteen millions or twice that of New England, there is no other mission hospital for women and no other woman doctor. There are government or municipal hospitals for women and children, but these are staffed with male doctors; since the drain of the war many of these are Indians. Owing to the seclusion of women and the prejudices and customs of the land only the very poorest women or those in the immediate vicinity will come to such a hospital.

Medical work for women was begun in Madura city by the late Mrs. S. B. Capron and through her earnest endeavors a dispensary was built and Miss Pauline M. Root, M.D., was sent out by the Woman's Board in 1885. She began the erection of a small, two-story hospital but left India in 1891 before its completion. It was dedicated in 1893. Dr. Harriet E. Parker was appointed as her successor and arrived early in 1896. Dr. Parker was born in Putney, Vermont. She studied at Smith College, 1885-1887, and is a graduate of the Woman's Medical College of Philadelphia.

The city of Madura was built originally as a fort with the great Hindu temple of Meenachi, the Fish-eyed Goddess, at its center. A second center is the great palace of Tirumal Naiyak about one-half mile southeast of the temple. The American Mission compound is due east of the palace, with only one narrow block of one-story houses between. Thus the new hospital for women and children is built on the corner of the compound immediately opposite the main entrance of the fine old palace that Government has repaired, restored and taken over for public offices.

The new hospital, which is of brick and steel with hollow tiled floors, is in the shape of the letter E, with the front towards the West. It is two stories high and the foundations will permit a third story whenever that may be needed. The government generously made a half-grant on the cost of the building and allowed the Executive Engineer of the Public Works Department to supervise its construction. The Mission put the erection of the buildings into the capable and experienced hands of its treasurer, Mr. James H. Lawson, and whenever he has any disagreement with the contractors over the quality of either materials or workmanship the decision of the Executive Engineer is final. The hospital plant has also been greatly benefited by the generous counsel of a fine Christian gentleman, Mr. S. D. Pears of Madras, until recently chief engineer to the government in the department of Public Works. All the plans and construction of modern hospitals in Southern India, civil and mission, were carefully considered while our plans were being drawn and revised.

The hospital is so built that it can easily be kept clean and disinfected without and within, below and above. The stairs are broad and of easy grade so that stretcher cases may be moved up and down easily. One wing is reserved for maternity cases. There is an isolation ward and one for convalescents. The morgue has a building quite apart by itself as far removed as possible from all others. A septic tank is being installed. In a land where there is such strictness in the observance of caste regulations the diet-kitchen arrangements are not simple. A Brahman woman or child may eat only food prepared by a Brahman cook in quarters not used by lower castes, so a separate kitchen is supplied for them. The Sourashta or Silk-weaver

caste has endowed a ward and a kitchen for the use of its own people.

The Nurses' Home is in a long wing at right angles to the Doctor's bungalow, fifty or sixty yards to the rear of the hospital. The training of nurses is an important part of the work of the hospital and candidates are sent by Missions in other districts. In a country of such dense ignorance and gross superstition very little dependence can be placed upon the intelligence or judgment of either the patients or their attendant relatives. Instructions are but imperfectly understood and are not thought worth the trouble of remembering or obeying. The magic Western medicine is the thing. If a little does good, more will do it quicker and better and allow the patient the sooner to get back to a festival, funeral, wedding, or to the domestic tasks in house or field. A medicine may be prescribed for external use only, but the pain is inside and the magic can get to work sooner and more effectively, it is thought, if put within—often with surprising and disappointing results. Moreover the Dravidian ideas of sanitation or even of simple cleanliness are almost always rudimentary and hostile to any improvement in the patient. So while a relative or two has to be allowed to stay by the patient to help care for her and to reassure her timid mind in strange surroundings, a trained nurse has to be in constant attendance to see that the doctor's orders as to rest, medicine and food are obeyed. A common danger is that a zealous friend will smuggle in bazaar-food, long-cooked and exposed to flies, dust and indiscriminate handling—often of the utmost danger to the patient, especially in the time of epidemic cholera.

India is yet a century from the general acceptance of the germ-theory of disease. It is much simpler to believe that Kali-Amman, the smallpox goddess, is angry and demands victims rather than that germs from the patients cause others to be ill! Garlands across the street and sacrifices to her idol are to their minds much more useful than the dreaded vaccination. What cannot be seen does not exist, seems to be their simple creed. Such patients and their village sympathizers obey hospital rules generally only under the fear of being sent away. Many are the anxieties of the doctor lest bandages be removed too soon because uncomfortable, or patients insist upon leaving prematurely because homesick or tired of restraint. Too often any

reason save the right one is given when a case thus turns out unfavorably. But experience is a dear teacher and a good part of the nurses' work is to warn obdurate patients of the dire results of disobeying what the Doctor Ammarl has said.

India is a land of such brilliant sunshine and of so very little protection to the eyes from glare, dust and infection from the minute swarming eye-flies, eager for the moisture of neglected eyes, noses, and mouths, that eye-troubles are very common, ranging from ophthalmia or "country sore-eyes" to glaucoma, granulated lids and cataract.

After harvest time the women and girls walking bare-footed over the woody stubble cut their feet badly and the wounds bound up with soiled rags often become infected sores. Scanty and improper food often aggravate what would be otherwise simple cases. Malignant ulcers often result from unclean lives. Reliance upon quack doctors, with their worse than useless remedies and incantations, often result in a patient coming either too late or needlessly ill to the place where alone skill and the right remedies are available.

But in this respect conditions are steadily improving. With thirty or forty thousand treatments a year or possibly twelve thousand separate patients, ideas and treatments learned, or at least partially understood, while in the hospital, are carried back to their homes by patients who have been helped. These new ideas are given currency at the village well, at the community threshing-floor, or during the long walks to the weekly markets where grain and fuel are taken to exchange for the week's supply of curry stuffs and oil. The Bible-women assigned to the hospital tell the Gospel message to the patients waiting at the dispensary for their treatment and mingle freely with the convalescents. So the knowledge of the "new way" is brought to thousands of lives through the ministry of suffering.

Some peculiar ideas are current among the people. Often children are to be seen with three horizontal scars across the abdomen; these show that during an attack of colic the sufferer was branded with a hot iron. She recovered; *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. Among the Romanists this branding is usually done in the form of the cross or sometimes by four dots on forehead, chin, and both cheeks. An ancient dame comes along with a great recital of ills and ailments, from wandering pains and sleeplessness to

coolness of the blood and "a sort of a kind of feeling" winding up with a rat-bite.

"When were you bitten?" promptly queries the doctor.

"Seven years ago last mango time," the dame replies. And it appears that as many ills spring from the bite of a rat as from the breaking of a looking glass in more enlightened lands.

One day, out in a distant village, a farmer brought his mare with both eyes blinded by cataract and his old sister with two joints missing from her middle finger ever since she was born and asked that both be made whole! An old man comes and drops dejectedly at the door step and when asked his ailment he says, "*Butthi illai!*" (I have no sense). While the doctor has the greatest sympathy with his need the pharmacopeia lists no remedy for his cure.

The doctor in India meets many abnormal growths and unusual perversions of Nature's orderly ways; but their recital would be more appropriate in a medical journal. One interesting disease, known the world over as "the Madura foot" is peculiar to the district. It is a form of elephantiasis where, first in the foot then the ankle, but never higher than the knee, the foot swells until it is the size of a twelve-quart pail and the toes are swallowed up until they appear to be but warts. There is no remedy for it but amputation; ordinarily the sufferer endures the burden for a long time before willing to submit to treatment.

The Visitors' Book, maintained at the hospital for officials and others to record their impressions of its work, has many interesting records. Some of the most flattering were written by the governors of the Madras Presidency—Lord Wenlock, Sir Arthur Havelock, Lord Ampthill, Baron Carmichael and Lord Pentland, often by their Ladyships as well. The Surgeons General and district medical and sanitary officers, while pointing out occasional lack of equipment, have uniformly praised the good work they have found done.

Both the Madura Municipality and the District Board have generously supplemented the Government's grants-in-aid by annual donations from their budgets. The Lessees of the Sigaganga Zemindari have for years made an annual grant to the Hospital from their Mahimai Fund which is a regular portion of their yearly income devoted to charity and religion. But all these grants total only about one-sixth of the hospital's yearly

expenses. This means that, in addition to the doctor's constitutional unwillingness to miss a single opportunity to save life or alleviate pain, there is added this stress of supplementing the hospital's income by outside practice.

Until Dr. Parker was able to replace her horse and carriage some four years ago with a Ford car, she was extremely fortunate if an emergency call took her most of the way by railway. Only very rarely was the husband or father of the patient able to send his own car or hire a reliable one. The doctor has had many experiences with ill-found cars, balky or under-fed jutka ponies, and long journeys over rough country roads in bullock carts with a cruising speed of two miles an hour. A tiffin-basket and thermos flask, or a humble earthenware water jar, were necessary parts of her equipment along with instrument bag, medicine chest, toilet case, and, if the conveyance permitted, a nurse. The car has more than doubled her effective radius beside allowing her many more nights of sleep at home. A new one should be supplied soon to replace the much-used old one.

Many people living in remote parts of the District never have seen a railway train, a motor car, or a horse-drawn vehicle. Such folk learn to suffer uncomplainingly and never realize that by a few miles or hours of journey they could gain relief for themselves, their wives or children. Dr. Parker enjoys nothing better than to go on a medical tour to visit such regions. Usually she joins with some district missionary who can furnish the necessary tents and transportation. Notice is sent on before to the weekly market or to some central village that on a given date the white Doctor Ammarl is coming and will freely treat all pain and illness. Hundreds will come, men, women and children, and gather under the trees near her tent; the missionary and his helpers will preach to them while awaiting their turn with the doctor. Scores of minor troubles are relieved immediately; the severer cases are sometimes persuaded to make the long journey to the hospital where they may have the further care that is necessary.

One of the most terrible diseases of India is leprosy, the only one that Dr. Parker confesses she fears; so it was characteristic of her to volunteer to open an asylum for those afflicted with this malady when there seemed no other way to secure one. Under the easy rule of England the attendance is purely voluntary;



great numbers prefer to haunt the cities and large towns, or beat their way from shrine to shrine, festival to festival, to gather the generous alms which it is a part of the Hindu religion to bestow indiscriminately. The Edinburgh Leper Aid Society, the Government and the Sivagange Zemindari gave grants-in-aid to erect the necessary buildings and sink the wells at Daiyapuram (Village of Mercy) on a wide, wind-swept, treeless plateau a mile out of Manamadura. There for ten years a growing work of mercy and healing has been carried on.

Strange as it may seem the American army surgeons in the Philippines discovered, used and reported a cure for leprosy—chanmoogra-oil—which injected intraveinously has the power to arrest the ravages of the disease. Dr. Parker is very reserved in her claims as to results obtained, but when the disease has not advanced too far before treatment is begun, most cases show marked improvement; many have been sent back to their homes without any signs of the disease and without recrudescence. Many a sufferer has found the Great Physician and entered into a new life through the ministry to the body, mind, and soul at Daiyapuram and, like the lepers of old, have gone back to their homes to witness to His power and grace.

This institution requires a visit at least once each week by the doctor, involving a thirty-mile railway journey for herself and a nurse, with two miles by bullock cart, and the return journey late the same night. The physical labor of giving one hundred or more sterilized intraveinuous injections at one clinic is in itself a great task. But with the exception of the American missionary nurse the doctor has never entrusted them to anyone else. The utmost precautions as to dress and contact have to be observed to prevent contagion that would endanger herself and others; this makes an added strain.

There remains the Birds' Nest, the doctor's one diversion. It is really a private orphanage which has grown out of the conjunction of the unloved and abandoned babies and the doctor's tender heart. All are legally adopted by the doctor. Only she herself can tell how many have learned to call her "Mother-Doctor" in the past twenty years that she has had a residence outside the hospital building itself. Several have succumbed to starvation or to the diseases which they had suffered before they came under her care. Some had all too poor a start in

their ill-assorted parentage and could not weather the usual ills of childhood, even though the utmost care was lavished upon them. Without actual count a casual friend would say that they number now about twenty, not including one of the eldest, Miss Grace Kennett, who, in 1918, returned from her medical studies in Madras a licensed practitioner. She is proving to be an immense help to the doctor in the care of the hospital. Nor does it include Compounder Margaret, plump, smiling and efficient, a great help in shepherding the little flock of Birds' Nesters who might otherwise overwhelm the doctor while off duty and relaxing in the midst of her happy, bare-footed, smiling family.

The Nest itself is a series of rooms at the rear of the doctor's bungalow where a matron cares for the children as they eat, play and sleep on the floor in true Indian style. All attend the day school from earliest school-going age, and such as can benefit by it are sent to the higher schools to fit them for useful lives. Two of the younger boys are albinos with pinkish white skins and weak eyes that will never have normal vision. It is natural from the prejudice of the people against girls that in the Birds' Nest the girls outnumber the boys about three to one.

When the record of India's redemption is completed it may prove that the little Doctor Ammarl with her Hospital, Leper Asylum, Birds' Nest and medical itineracies out in the neglected corners of the District, will have counted for more than some of the better known and more amply financed agencies. It is difficult to imagine a work where an investment of help will yield larger returns.

NOTE: Rev. Mr. Holton is a missionary of the American Board in the Madura Mission who has first-hand knowledge of the Hospital at Madura and of Dr. Parker's self-denying work.

*The Editor.*



